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# Isaiah 26:1-2, 1927 - 1930

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ISAIAH 26, 1-2 [Church Dedication]

"In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in".

The magnificent beauty of the Christian religion, my dear friends, stands as a living monument to its divine origin. This beauty shines from every page of the sacred record; it is present, wistful, peaceful and still in the story of the Savior's birth; it appears in the detailed record of the Redeemer's life here on earth; and it is a glorious glory in the

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that in these doctrines lies the only hope for a humanity fallen and lying hopelessly in a blind world, a world doomed to death and destruction.

It is fitting and proper, my dear friends, that you have endeavored to grasp a small part of this great beauty of the Christian religion by embodying it in this new church which you are today dedicating to the worship of the Most High. It is God's will that Christians should also by the beautiful external appearance of their houses of worship, show their appreciation



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The magnificent beauty of the Christian religion, my dear friend, stands as a living monument to its divine origin. This beauty shines from every page of the sacred record; it is present, wistful, peaceful and still in the story of the Savior's birth; it appears in the detailed record of the Redeemer's life here on earth; and it shines with especial glory in the story of Calvary and the Godman dying on the cross for the sins of a hostile and jeering world. IT shines also in all the writings of the Apostles; reading their letters one feels immediately that, by the grace of God, they have come to feel the great beauty and sublime splendor of the doctrines which they are preaching. They have come to know that in these doctrines lies the only hope for a humanity fallen away from God and lying hopelessly and helplessly in a sinner's world, a world doomed to death and destruction.

IT is eminently fitting and proper, my dear friends, that you have endeavored to grasp a small part of this great beauty of the Christian religion by embodying it in this new church which you are today dedicating to the worship of the Most High. IT is God's will that Christians should also by the beautiful external appearance of their houses of worship, show their appreciation



of the glorious beauty of the eternal truths proclaimed within them. And this is all the more true because your new church, as all Christian houses of worship, is not only the dwelling-place of divine beauty, but also of divine holiness. Think upon it, my dear friends: As long as the Word of God is preached here in all its truth and purity, this church is God's dwelling-place, His own habitation! Do we always realize everything which that thought implies? Every time you enter this church to hear the Word of God you will be entering the presence of the Most High; the Great God of all grace and mercy will be present when you bring your children to the baptismal font; He will be present when your young men and women join their hands in holy wedlock before this altar; He will be present when your loved ones and you yourself journey to this house of God before your bodies are laid away to await the great day of His final coming. Is that not a solemn thought, my dear friends? You have built a house, weak, small and frail as all things built with human hands; today you are inviting God, (as it were) to dwell in it, - and He comes and dwells with you, the great Lord of heaven and earth, and within these walls He promises to shower down upon you the infinite blessings of His divine grace and mercy. (But there is always danger of falling away).

My dear friends, if you, as true believers will but remain faithful to the eternal verities of Holy Writ, then this congregation will ever be and remain an integral part of that great



city of which the prophet speaks in the words of our text: "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks; Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in". The prophet is here gazing far into the future and with a divinely inspired vision he sees rising that magnificent temple not made with hands - the great Church of the New Testament, the Church invisible. To this Church I would draw your attention this evening in order that, by the grace of God, we may gain a picture of what your church here in Harvel should be and, under the mercy of God, will be. For, ever and ever, the visible church here on earth strives to become more and more like the great Church Invisible which God Himself is building with the living stones of His saints here on earth and which has Christ as the great foundation and cornerstone.

You will notice that our text divides itself easily and naturally into three parts:

- I. THE CITY OF GOD - THE CHURCH.
- II. SALVATION GOD APPOINTS FOR WALLS.
- III. THE CITIZENS OF THAT CITY - A RIGHTEOUS NATION.

I.

You have built here a house unto your God. And I am sure that you have tried to express in it your vision of that great Church beautiful - the Church invisible. You have built here a strong house, as human houses go. By the grace of God it will weather many a storm which will beat against its walls and sweep over its roof. And yet you realize today, my friend, that it is only



a faint shadow of that great Church of which the prophet here speaks when he says, "We have a strong city".

"We have a strong city". There is a note of triumph in the prophet's voice as he speaks these words. And his words could well be on our lips this evening. We, too, have a strong city, the great Church of God; for two thousand years it has stood over against the storms of time; it has stood on the foundation of the prophets and apostles with Jesus Christ as the great Cornerstone; it has stood firm and immovable when the storms of confusion swept over the world, when the winds of doubt and unbelief shook the minds of men, when the hearts and souls of men were torn and shaken with fear and trembling. Nations have risen and fallen, kingdoms have come and gone, untold millions have lived and died, and through all this change, through all these upheavals this great city, the Church of God, has stood majestic in its immovable grandeur, glorious in its unshakeable firmness, divine in its enduring strength.

Surely, my dear friend, the hour this evening is opportune for our contemplation of this great city of God. For we are living in times when we need the enduring strength of this great city more than ever before. We are living in a day of fluctuation, of change of opinion, of shaking of institutions, of new social, economic and political questions, threatening day by day to reorganize society. Nay more - all the forces of hell have broken loose once more in this evening time of the world; the



storms of doubt, unbelief, atheism are sweeping over the Church of God; the insidious tides of modernism and indifferentism are seeking to draw away and destroy the very foundations upon which the Church of God is built. Ah, where today is strength, where is firmness, where is unshakable endurance to meet these storms? My friends, hear the triumphant words of Isaiah ringing down through the ages: "There shall be a song in the land of Judah: We have a strong city". Divinely inspired, Isaiah is calling to the Christians of the New Testament, calling down through the span of years, calling also to you and to me, "Be strong, be strong!" We have a strong city built on the eternal truths which will not be moved though heaven and earth shall pass away; we have a strong city held in the immovable hollow of God's almighty Hand.

See, my dear friend, such a strong city also your church here will be to you. Here you will gather in the days and years which lie before you in order to gain strength and courage for the battles of life. Here in this visible representation of that great invisible Church you will find peace and rest from the trials and storms which will beset you on your journey through this vale of tears. Here you will come and gather strength from your Savior, the strong Conqueror over death and the powers of hell, from your Savior, whose strength is made perfect in weakness. O, my friends, thank God for it this night; you have a strong city in a world of weakness; you have a city of peace in a world of war and rumors of war; you have a city of grace



and forgiveness in a world of sin and damnation.  
How truly blessed you are!

## II.

But not only is this city, the Church Invisible, strong in itself, but it has also been surrounded by walls and bulwarks. The prophet says in our text, "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks". The picture which the prophet here uses is highly imaginative and picturesque. Let us note first that GOD HIMSELF "appoints" the walls and bulwarks of this great city, His Church. It is not the work of frail human hands; no, God, and God alone, can trace the lines of its walls; His hand alone can pile the stones of such walls; and He alone can lay them in the blood and righteousness of His only-begotten Son. And what are these walls?

The prophet answers: Salvation. The great fact of salvation is the wall of this city.

And this is just another way of saying that our Savior and His redeeming work form the walls of His Church. And how true that is! The dweller within the walls of this city does not flee behind his own works when the devil, the world and his own flesh attack him. No, he flees behind "the walls of salvation"; he flees behind the cross of His Savior; there he is safe, there he is secure for God has appointed salvation as the walls of this city. My dear friend, behind the walls of this salvation you, too, may hide when the storms of this world sweep over you, when the forces of the Evil One come to attack you. You, too, may then run to the cross of your Savior there to hide behind the invisible walls of His eternal



grace and mercy; you, too, may then come to Calvary to see God building the walls of this great city on the very lifeblood of His only-begotten Son; with peace in your heart, with joy on your lips you, too, will then be able to sing:

Savior since of Zion's city  
I through grace, a member am,  
Though the world deride and pity  
I will glory in thy name.  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure  
All his boasted pomp and show  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion's children know.

My dear friend, let the walls of this new church be ever a symbol to you of the walls of the great Church invisible - your salvation. Then you will find also behind these walls made with human hands, the full measure of peace and quiet, of joy and happiness which comes only from the supreme assurance that in life and death you are surrounded by walls of God's own building - salvation effected through the blood and righteousness of His only-begotten Son, your God and Savior.

### III.

But the prophet does not only describe the city of God and its walls; no, he also gives the qualifications of the citizens, "they shall be a righteous nation which keepeth the truth". A righteous nation? we ask. Is that possible here on earth? Ah yes, my friend, for this nation is clothed in the righteousness of its Lord and Savior. This nation, the communion of saints, has seen that its own righteousness avails nothing; it has seen that in order to be safe behind the walls of salvation, it must put



on the spotless garments of the righteousness purchased by the blood of the eternal Son of God. No other qualification for citizenship is necessary; no wealth, no honored position among men, no virtue of character. Righteousness, salvation bought without money and without price - this alone qualifies a man to enter the gates of this city. And that is why the city has within its walls the poor, the halt, the lame and the blind; no earthly beauty or virtue is necessary; faith and faith alone opens the gates of this city.

In the prophet's other clause there sounds a deep note of solemn warning. This righteous nation must be a nation which "keepeth the truth". He points here to the fact that here on earth this great city of God, the Church invisible, is a city at war, a Church militant. She does not rest on flowery beds of ease; - no, she must fight to keep the truth. Within her walls lie the sacred truths of divine revelation, the great truths of God concerning the redemption of a sin-cursed and dying world, the eternal truths without which she cannot exist. O, my friends, let us not deceive ourselves; the Church of God will remain the Church militant until the end of time; ever and ever she must war against principalities and powers, against the princes of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places; she must keep the truth, hold it, cling to it though all the forces of hell combine against her.

And with the completion of your new new church, my dear friend, and its dedication



today, God wishes also to call your attention once more to your solemn obligation and your supreme duty. You, too, are to keep the truth, you are to retain it in all its divine purity, you are to fight for it when God calls upon you to do so. Oh, make a solemn covenant with your God today, that you will keep the truth; make a solemn vow before the throne of the Almighty that these walls shall never hear man-made doctrine or the products of human wisdom; pray God today that as long as this Church shall stand the people within its walls will hold to the truth, cling to the truth, defend the truth against all the attacks which will beset it in these last times of a world rushing to its final dissolution.

IN CONCLUSION, my dear friend, permit me to turn from Isaiah for a moment and point you to St. John's final vision of this great city, the Church of God. Gazing far into the future John's happy eyes see her transformed and translated from the invisible Church militant to the visible Church triumphant. He sees the end of the world and amid all the dust and the confusion and the crash of ruin, he sees the Church of God, the communion of saints, standing revealed, slowly being lifted up into heaven. Her glories are unveiled, her golden streets, her open gates, her walls of precious stones, her flashing river, her peaceful inhabitants, her light streaming from the throne of her God and Savior. And amid all that glory he hears the song of God's redeemed echoing and re-echoing on the golden streets of the heavenly Jerusalem, "Worthy is the Lamb" etc. May God grant, my dear friend, that we shall then all meet again - on that great day of dedication, in the heavenly Jerusalem.

AMEN.